

## Why Food Reformers Have Mixed Feelings About Eco-Labels

By Rachel Martin, *June 12, 2019, The Salt*

RACHEL MARTIN, HOST:

We are what we eat, right? Food companies know that, so they make labels that appeal to a person's ideals - organic or cage-free, fair trade. NPR's Dan Charles looked into these labels for our Life Kit podcast, and he found out some people who depend on these labels also have mixed feelings.

DAN CHARLES, BYLINE: Rebecca Thistlethwaite has spent most of her life trying to build a better food system.

REBECCA THISTLETHWAITE: I am the program manager of the Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network.

CHARLES: She helps people figure out how to make a living farming in a way that's good for the environment and humane for animals.

THISTLETHWAITE: I would never do away with labels. I think that farmers and food producers need to be able to tell their story.

CHARLES: And the words organic or pasture-raised can help tell the story, yet labels frustrate her. There can be such a gap between what they seem to promise and what they actually deliver. And marketing fills that gap. So for instance, free-range eggs - probably came from hens that spent most of their lives indoors. Or another example - non-GMO.

THISTLETHWAITE: (Laughter) I'm going to say, offhand, that is probably my least favorite label.

CHARLES: Non-GMO means the food wasn't made from genetically modified crops. The main ones are corn, soybeans and sugar beets. But companies are putting non-GMO on things like strawberries or mangoes that aren't ever genetically modified. Apparently because people think non-GMO means good for the environment, maybe less pesticide spray. But it does not.

THISTLETHWAITE: Non-GMO crops are still conventionally grown with synthetic pesticides and fertilizers. There's no significant environmental benefit.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2019/06/12/729596822/why-food-reformers-have-mixed-feelings-about-eco-labels>